News Briefs

KUDOS

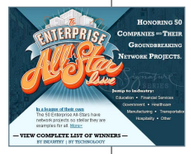
MINUTEMAN COMM: The 91st Space Wing completed the last modifications to its Minuteman minimum essential emergency communication network at the Oscar-01 missile alert facility in the Minuteman missile complex at Minot Air Force Base, N. D. Nov. 11. It marks the final modification to the last of 50 launch control centers in 20th Air Force. Other bases where modifications took place include Malmstrom AFB, Mont. and F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo.

"This brings our higher authority warfighting communications systems into the 21st century," Col. Dan Adams said. Colonel Adams is the 91st SW commander.

The $250 million emergency communication system enhances the communications capability during an unconventional strike against the United States. In 1999, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed development of the network to replace the survivable low frequency communications system installed in 1962.

Kent Huebner, a network technical advisor and communications engineer from Hanscom, said the new system also provides a Milstar satellite capability in the extremely high frequency range with transmission security the old system did not have. *(Staff Sgt. Carla Williams, 5th BW/PA)*

ALL-STAR AWARD: The Defense Information Systems Agency announced that it has received a 2005 "Network World" Enterprise All-Star Award for innovative applications of network technology. DISA was chosen by "Network World" magazine for its use of business service management technology to centralize control of network infrastructure to facilitate greater efficiency, and ultimately, process maturity.



Instead of managing IT as individual components comprised of servers, applications or networks, DISA has maximized software technology to create views of logically interrelated elements that collectively deliver IT services crucial for the warfighter. This has greatly enhanced situational awareness, substantially reduced costs and increased end-user satisfaction. *(DISA/PA)*

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

TSP ENROLLMENT CHANGES: Effective in 2006, civilian and military employees are no longer subject to a percentage limit on the amount they may contribute to a regular Thrift Savings Plan account. They may contribute the full amount allowed by the Internal Revenue Service annual elective deferral limit, which is $15,000 for 2006. Open seasons were eliminated July 1, 2005, so employees may start, change, stop or resume their TSP contributions at any time (except those in the six-month non-contribution period following a financial hardship in-service withdrawal).

TSP offers investors the chance for lower taxes each year they contribute while not having to pay taxes on earnings until they reach retirement. Eligible employees can take out loans, make in-service withdrawals from their TSP accounts, and keep their account even if they leave military or federal civilian service. Specifics about the changes available at **www.tsp.gov**. *(AFNS)*

SMART OPERATIONS 21: The Air Force used the best parts of several civilian efficiency programs to develop an Air Force-unique process-improvement program called "Smart Operations 21," Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne said.

He explained how the program will take the Air Force forward in a journey of self-improvement.

"The name came from a convocation of the senior operators in the field who thought we could continue our journey into higher quality and better performance by using a term that would relate to airfield operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, unmanned aerial vehicle operations or cyberspace operations," he said. "So Air Force Smart Operations 21 is the ideal project name for this journey we are embarking on."

The program is based on both Lean and Six Sigma business process improvement tools. Six Sigma deals primarily with quality control and tolerances. A process is made lean by re-engineering it to eliminate steps that add no value to the end product or by combining process steps to save time. These tools were developed chiefly in the private sector to focus on increasing value to customers, save time and money, reduce waste and improve quality.

For instance, moving tools and supplies closer to a work area to reduce the number of footsteps workers must take to complete their jobs.

It's also about minimizing "batch and queue" processes. In manufacturing, a raw material may need to pass through several workstations before it becomes a final product. The initial workstation may drill a single hole or make a single cut in a batch of several thousand pieces of raw material.

The semi-finished parts then go into a queue, waiting for the next step in the process. Once the part is cut or drilled, it loses its value as raw material, but has gained no value as a final product. So, it becomes a financial liability. A leaner process would attempt to move each part through the system in one pass, if possible, to eliminate warehousing of unfinished parts.

Secretary Wynne said the Air Force will use Smart Operations 21 to increase the efficiency of the processes it uses to develop its own products. For instance, by creating work cells where aircraft move through at a pace of one every two days, the Air Force eliminates having large numbers of aircraft lined up waiting for somebody to get to them to apply the next step in the process. Now aircraft can move quickly from cell to cell. Paying attention to individual processes optimizes work within a cell. Tools and parts are made available to workers locally, so they don't have to travel to get them.

Secretary Wynne said the Air Force needs a strategy to understand and optimize the basic processes around which it organizes. Smart Operations 21 will be the centerpiece of the strategy. *(Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez/AFPN)*

DAILY CHECKS

Airman Julianne Trulson / 435th CS

Staff Sergeant Brian Sheldon performs a daily preventative maintenance inspection on a satellite communications van during exercise Wing Lightning at Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, in November. He's a member of the 1st Combat Communications Squadron.

From the SECAF Michael W. Wynne

"We bring the best equipment we can muster through a wonderful industry partnership, but without the bravery, persistence and indebtedness of the Airmen manning it, it wouldn't be worth very much. (The trip to Southwest Asia recently) made me very proud to be called the secretary of our Air Force."

eBooks!
Easing the reading load for students

Ask anyone who has been to the Air and Space Basic Course or Squadron Officer College what they remember most about their experience, and one of the items they're sure to mention is the amount of reading. Each student receives more than 800 pages of course material.

So the communicators at Air University and the instructors at SOC took a page from corporate America where electronic books, or eBooks, are replacing handouts and other printed training material. After taking a hard look at the economic and logistical benefits, it just made sense to make the change.

eBooks are small, portable, lightweight reading devices about the size of a standard hardcover book that offer an alternative to paper. Besides being more portable than an 11 inch stack of handouts, SOC thought there was the potential to reduce its printing costs of about $400,000 per year. After a pilot study showed 75 percent of students who tested the product rated them as excellent or better, SOC decided to roll them out in both courses.

Since August 2005, SOC has reported a savings of about $34,000, and it expects to see even more savings this fiscal year as it nearly eliminates 8 million pages of printed text. Additionally, the flight commanders will be able to save more than 2,000 hours each year that they had previously spent unpacking, sorting, performing quality control, updating, and distributing books to the classrooms. Another advantage they offer over paper is that they give curriculum developers the power to update course material at any time during the course. The students simply attach their devices to an "e-Content Distribution Node," a five-port switch found in each classroom, and refresh their content in about 10 minutes.

These devices allow students to do more than simply read through page-after-page of text. They're also able to do a text search, highlight important passages, underline, circle, and write short notes directly onto the screen. One can then plug the device into a USB port and download those notes to an image file for printing or later review. So ultimately, this technology is proving itself to be a worthwhile, cost saving addition to the classrooms. This is just an example of the kind of innovative, learning-enhancing technology Air Education and Training Command is bringing to the Air Force. *(AETC/SC)*

IT showcase

"Innovative technology" was the operative term when AETC showcased its information technology initiatives at the AFCEA and SAF/A6-sponsored Air Force IT Day in November. Representatives from AETC/SC, Air University, and Sheppard AFB's 82d Training Wing, presented vendors with ongoing and potential training enhancement opportunities. Such new-generation ideas as WiMAX to provide a blanket of wireless connectivity across a base, Podcasting, wireless classrooms, student workstation remoting, using streaming video to store and broadcast lectures, and wireless rugged laptops for training mechanics, gave vendors an idea of how the command is aggressively modernizing the Air Force training environment.